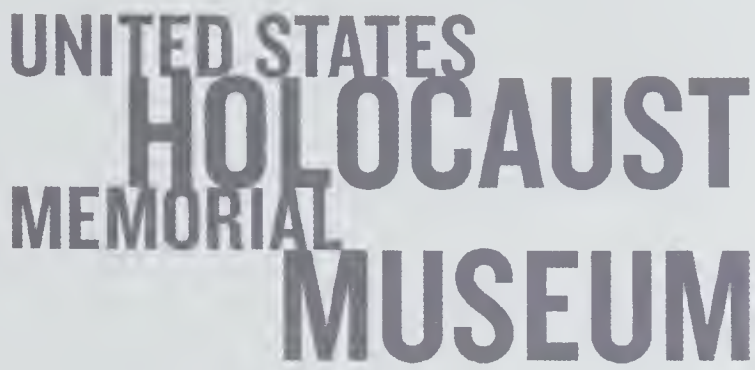

ועידת התביעות
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AGNES KUN, NÉE DIAMANTSTEIN

MY TURN ??

At the Museum of Tolerance, during my weekly talk about my experiences in the Holocaust, there are two questions that I am routinely asked:

1) Why don't I write a book?
2) How was my religious belief effected?

The answer to No. 1 is: because everybody else already did; and to No. 2: after everything that happened to me I still believe in the basic goodness and decency of human beings and that alone, if you want, is a miracle.

The truth is that I don't have traditional beliefs, my Jewishness is more a state of mind than a religion. Since my parents died for it, I could not deny my Jewishness any more than I could deny my humanity.

As far as my story goes -- maybe it's my turn...

So here it goes!

PART I

Where are my beginnings? Where do the first memories come from? Certainly not the first events remembered from my early childhood. They start somewhere much, much earlier, maybe with the ancestors I never knew but are part of me. The great grandfather who traveled from castle to castle to bind books for the Transylvanian nobility, the grandfather whose love of land was exceeded only by his love of family or the grandmother, the only grandparent I actually knew, who raised eight children (five of her own), learned how to read and write, became the most insatiable reader after her children were grown and, yes she was burned in the ovens of Auschwitz at the age of 81.

This was my father's side of the family rooted deeply in the hills of Transylvania. One of my uncles did some research in the nineteen forties and discovered an ancestor buried in a small rural cemetery in the 1740's and the headstone said he was born in the same village.

I know much less of my mother's family, my grandmother died of typhoid fever during the first World War, my grandfather, who owned a tavern in a small sub-Carpathian town (formerly Austria-Hungary, Checko-Slovakia, and now the Soviet Union), died in 1923, same as my paternal grandfather. My mother was the youngest of eight children (three from my grandfather's previous marriage). Interestingly, my two grandfathers who lived many miles apart and never met, were born and died in the same year, they each lost their first wife, had two boys and one girl from their first marriage and three girls and two boys from their second marriage.

My father, who was not a religious man chose to give a minimum attention to the prayer book on Seder nights, that we celebrated at my mother's insistence, he filled the time with old family stories instead. This is how I learned about the passover celebration at my grandfathers house on the farm, with all the married children coming in from towns and cities twenty or more people sitting around the table, fascinating to me, an only child! The grandchild who found the hidden piece of matzo was always given a calf, that was subsequently raised on the farm, to be sold later by my grandfather with the proceeds going in the bank for the lucky grandchild. I always felt disadvantaged being born three years after my grandfather's death.

Frequent stories were told about my Uncle Shamu, my father's half brother, a delightful charming man, the black sheep of the family. He cheerfully adopted the lifestyle of Hungarian nobility, drinking the nights away, womanizing and generally having a good time were main preoccupations.

My grandfather, otherwise a real disciplinarian, had no choice but to grudgingly pay his sons debts. One of the stories about Uncle Shamu tells about the time when he went to Budapest, where he ran into a son of one of my grandfathers farm-hands, who worked as a chauffeur at some count's house, where he introduced my uncle to a pretty chambermaid. They made a late night date, but my uncle somehow climbed in through the wrong window and woke up in the morning next to the slightly overweight, middle aged but eternally grateful cook. In his later years my uncle became a devoted husband and father.

Some of my father's stories had a morale, like when, as a high school senior he went to pay his tuition but on the way stopped at a cafe and lost the money at the billiard tables. He told my grandfather that as he crossed the bridge he took the money out of his pocket and the wind blew it in the river, but when his father looked straight in his eyes, he had no choice but tell the truth. Maybe this incident had something to do with the fact that my father never gambled.

At the start of the first World War in 1914, my father was 18 and after a few months deferment for college he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. After a short training in officer's school (everybody with a high school diploma went to officers school) he was sent to the Russian front, where he spent uninterrupted eighteen months on the battlefield. He was always a pacifist but not doing his duty when his country called was never an option he considered.

After the end of the war he worked as an accountant and when my grandfather died in 1923 and he received some money, he went to Paris for a year where he took courses in French history and literature at the Sorbonne. My father became a successful businessman in his thirties, but I always felt he would be happier writing poetry. He was exceptionally bright and I guess realistic enough to know that most poets don't make a living. He read a lot, loved the theater, loved music, was easy-going, extremely generous and mostly he had something that set him apart from his generation of businessmen: he never regarded money as a final goal in life, money was only the means to have a good life. When I think of him, dead at 48, my only very small consolation is that he had a good life.

My mother was a beautiful woman! She was bright, had a good sense of humor and was very outgoing. She never worked in her life outside our home but the only people she envied where working

women. Her oldest brother was a lawyer, but small town Jewish girls of her generation just didn't go to school past ninth grade. She read a lot. I used to call her the "reading queen" when I was little. Besides playing cards with the ladies, her only other passion was housecleaning. In our part of the world you didn't have to be rich to have one live-in maid. When we were poor we had only one girl, later when we were comfortable, we had two but that did not stop my mother from cleaning house for hours every single day. Of course, we did not have today's modern appliances. My friends loved to come to our house, my mother was so funny, she kept us in stitches.

On Thursdays we left the gate open, it was the beggar's day. They came all day long, our kitchen was in a half basement, there was a bowl in the window with change and whoever happened to be in the kitchen gave a certain standard amount to each beggar. My mother also always found a poor family that she sent food to every Friday. Part of the food package was always one homemade "Chalah" (kalacs in Hungarian.) They also made bread once a week and took it to the bakers to be baked in large ovens. Nothing tastes better than the end of fresh homemade bread with fresh butter or sour cream.

My Aunt Bella, one of my father's older sisters, was the only one married to a farmer. They lived in a large village in Hungary (only about 20 kilometers from my hometown - Satu Mare, Romania) and they baked their own bread; she was also the best cook in this world. We visited often, taking a cab to the border, where my uncle waited for us with the horse drawn carriage. My uncle was the oldest of six brothers; all but one were farmers and lived in the same area. In wintertime, when there was hardly any work, they all congregated at my uncle's house since being the oldest he lived in the house where they all grew up. I remember the all night festivities, the gipsy musicians, the dancing. My uncle and his brothers looked and talked like any Hungarian farmer, but they observed all Jewish traditions. As a matter of fact, the only reason why my father did not like to visit on Saturdays was because he was expected to wear a hat and go to temple.

After my grandfather's death, my grandmother moved into the city (Targu Mures or Marosvasarhely) and bought a nice house with a small house in the back. She lived there with her youngest daughter, my Aunt Helen, and her family; the small house was occupied by my Uncle Shamu, his wife Ida and their son Laci (Leslie.) My grandmother was dearly loved by her children and stepchildren. She was very smart, she always minded her own business.

We visited grandma every year in summer vacation. I was always looking forward to these visits; the first night my cousin Ditha and I were up half the night talking about all the important events of the past year. On Sundays, my Aunt Helen went down to the basement and made chocolate and vanilla ice cream. My grandmother

often received gifts of fresh trout from former farm-hands. They baked those small trouts in the oven with butter and they were delicious.

My father's younger brother lived in a small town near Targu Mures. He was in forest related industry manufactured kayaks, window shade, lumber for musical instruments, etc.. An other older sister, Rose, lived with her family in the university town of Cluj (Kolozsvar.) Half brother Adolph and family lived in Targu Mures and half sister Bertha, the only one with a large family (six children) emigrated to then Palestine in the early 1920's.

On my mother's side all three half siblings died before I was born, my Uncle Bela a small town lawyer, lived with his wife and two sons in their town of birth, we visited often even though it was a different country - Checko-Slovakia. My mother's oldest sister, Ella, lived in Bucharest and ended up raising, with my mother and uncle's financial help, the middle sister Serena's two daughters. My Aunt Serena died at the age of 32 leaving two daughters five and six years old. Her husband, Kalman, died five or six years later. My Uncle Morris, according to the stories, got mixed up with the "wrong crowd" and my grandfather caught him playing cards at the age of 15. So, when he expressed his desire to emigrate to America, my grandfather did not stop him. He became hardworking, honest man, who never got rich. I never met him, he died a few years before we came to the United States.

Despite the fact that both my parents came from large families, I didn't have many cousins. On my father's side: Aunt Bella's two daughters: Erna and Rosie, Aunt Rosie's three daughters: Ann, Julie and Eva (Julie died at 23), Aunt Helen's daughter Ditha, Uncle Shamu's son Leslie and Uncle Adolph's son Odon. All but Ditha and Eva who are only a little older than me, were quite a bit older. The six cousins in Israel I didn't meet until 1982 when I met those four still alive. On my mother's side I had Uncle Bela's two sons: Steven and George, Aunt Serenas daughters" Suzy and Annie and three cousins from the two half brothers much, much older. I was the youngest cousin on both sides.

During his stay in Paris, my father befriended a young high school teacher from our part of the world, who was engaged to a girl from my mother's hometown. When they both returned his fiancee introduced my father to my mother and after one year of long distance courtship, they got married in 1925.

I was born nine months later, on May 3, 1926, probably causing a little disappointment since they expected a son named Peter. I always knew that my mother had a very hard time and they used high forceps to get me, but I only found out 21 years later when my first daughter was born, assisted by the same midwife, that the doctor told my mother not to have any more children. As a matter of fact, he asked my father during the difficult birth whom does he

want saved: mother or child. Naturally my father opted for his wife. So much for the first moments of my life, except that since they didn't have a girl's name prepared, my mother came up with Veronica, but then my Aunt Ilona (widow of a long dead half brother) stormed in and insisted they call me Agnes, like her younger sister.

At the time of my birth, my father worked as accountant and office manager in a flour mill. Actually, the whole staff consisted of two ladies, the owner's oldest son, who was just learning the ropes, the owner and my father.

I don't have too many memories of my early childhood. I was born in a modest apartment, where we lived for the next four years, after that we moved four times in two years, I guess trying to find something better, but none of these places were great. I went to a German preschool - kindergarten ran by a middle aged Jewish lady, Mrs. Friedman. Most of the time we had young Hungarian peasant girls for maids. My mother taught me to be very respectful and never was I allowed to use the familiar form of "thou" when I talked to the girls. My very favorite lady was "Aunt Elizabeth" (Erzsi neni), our washer woman. I had a small wooden tub and stood next to her most of the day washing my doll's clothes in the suds that she so generously provided. If asked, what do I want to be when I grow up, I answered: "A washer woman, because I want to have hands just like Erzsi neni's".

According to my mother, we were really poor in those days. She was on a tight self imposed budget, watching every penny and when "most people" vacationed in Abazzia on the Adriatic, we could only go to a nearby village in the mountains. I personally didn't feel deprived of anything; I was too young to know about fashionable summer resorts.

When I was in first grade, my father received this great offer from a company in Checko-Slovakia (about two hours train ride from our town) and we moved. The following year we moved to a larger town (Ungvar or Uzhorod), my father's earnings were about six times of his salary from only a little over a year ago. My mother was, of course, still on a self imposed budget, but now we vacationed at fashionable mountain resorts, went often to Budapest (my father traveled a lot for the business of importing and exporting of grains.) In money matters my parents were total opposites, my father extremely generous, my mother real down to earth.

For instance, a few times when in Budapest, my father would give me money to buy a doll (usually enough for five dolls), my mother would always take the money away and buy me one beautiful doll. Being an only child naturally I was the center of both of my parents' universe, but while my father would have spoiled me rotten, my mother tried very much not to.

During their three year stay in Checko-Slovakia, my well budgeted mother saved enough money to buy a beautiful house in our home town. Since my father decided to go in business with two partners, we returned to the place of my birth in 1936. Actually, I came almost a year earlier, I was boarding with an older couple, while I went to fourth grade, since it was very important to learn the Romanian language before I went to middle school, that started in fifth grade. They hired this young Romanian girl, who spent most of the day with me in order to practice the language. Of course, we spoke mostly Hungarian, went to the pastry shop on our way to piano lessons, but since I inherited my father's talent for languages, I learned Romanian in spite of all these. Oh, about piano lessons: I've been tortured since first grade and my sufferings didn't end until the end of my senior year in high school. I love music, but I hated to practice.

My parents moved back in 1936 and I started middle school in a famous Franciscan convent school, where a fairly large percentage of the girls were Jewish like myself.

Yes, about being Jewish! My mother kept a lot of the traditions, she said in honor of her departed parents. My father, like myself, considered his Jewishness, that he never denied, more a state of mind than a religion.

Until 1940, when I was 14, I never felt discriminated against but somehow just below the surface there was always enough anti-Semitism, that deep down in my heart I did resent being Jewish and I often asked myself why do I have to be different, why can't I be like everybody else. I know now that kids who were brought up in real religious homes and were told that they're better than the rest of the world did not have my feelings of inferiority. I hope a time will come when we all can be proud of our own heritage, without feeling superior to the rest of humanity.

There was a brief scary period in this time. In 1938, Romania had a real fascist regime, that lasted only a few weeks. One of the laws that they brought in was that Jewish households were not allowed to hire Christian maids under the age of 40. My mother got so upset that from than on even after the law was revoked, our live in maid was always a Jewish woman, but we still had Ilonka, who went home to sleep.

My life as a young teenager was wonderful! We all discovered boys around the age of 12 and from than on they became our constant subject of conversation. My best friends were Cathy, Eva and Agnes. Except for Agnes, we lived on the same block. We were so innocent! Holding hands or having your arms around each other were major events and a kiss was such a personal secret that you didn't even tell your best friend about it.

I remember fondly these four years ending in 1940 because these

were the last years that were still totally carefree. Of course, the war started in 1939 but at the age of 13 you're too involved in your own little world to pay much attention to the outside. Our school ran by Franciscan nuns, most of them totally selfless, devoted educators, was a very strict institution. Uniforms, black hose, hats and a certain hairstyle could only be dispensed with during summer vacations. You needed special permission to go to the movies, any kind of film, and if you were seen on the street with a boy by a nun or by those little despised brats in fifth or sixth grade, that squealed on you, you were in deep trouble. In today's world this might seem cruel, but since even public schools had similar, but maybe lesser enforced rules, we found all these normal and weren't unhappy. Our main entertainment was ice skating in winter time and the beach on the river in summer. Our ice skating rink was a frozen pond in a park and with a little shack built next to it used to put our skates on, get warm and buy refreshments. Besides the thrill of the sport itself, ice skating was great, because those were the only times when a boy was allowed to put his arms around you in view of the public. We skated every day right after school before doing homework. I had a very busy life: besides school, I had private lessons in English, French and German, piano and gymnastics. My friend Eva had a similar schedule. I was a good student in middle school and in high school when my passion for reading started to pay off, I became a straight "A" student.

Our beach on the river (Szamos or Somes) was a very elaborate affair. Most families who frequented this place had their own little cottage painted in all kinds of colors, big enough only for dressing and keeping a few things there for the summer. Each of these little wooden concoctions had a small patio attached with a built in table and benches. Ours was pink and white. Of course, we all brought extra lounging chairs for the summer. Our mothers mainly played cards, fathers came out for a short time after work and us kids had a wonderful time. We walked up the river outside the boundaries of the park, through orchards, and swam down the dirty river back to our beach. After consuming substantial snacks, we played games. There was a restaurant with a dance floor but in those years we were too young to be allowed to dance. My first "love affair" started when a bunch of us kids were around a friend's cottage all dressed, ready to go home and somebody undid the attached large cloth belt of my white and blue cotton dress in the back. I turned around and there he was, his name was Andrew (Andris) like most of the boys in our crowd, a very shy 15 year old. Of course, we did not date but for several months we both blushed when we ran into each other. As a matter of fact, even in later years we only were allowed to go out in groups. Walking in pairs was illegal activity, highly cherished moments. We played tennis in summer time, an excellent opportunity to walk with your love in the park at 6 o'clock in the morning. Probably that's why I never learned to really play tennis.

And this was life prior to 1940, full of laughter and even fuller of constant giggling. Our wonderful French teacher Sister Francisca left us in the middle of the year in eighth grade, she couldn't put up with our normal teenage noisiness anymore.

After the war started and the Nazis occupied Poland, escaped Jewish refugees showed up at our house frequently asking for assistance. My mother never let anybody leave the house empty handed. As time went by, through these people we learned about the beginning of ghettos in Poland. In later years we also heard about concentration camps but at no time did we have even the slightest suspicion that people are being murdered. In our minds these were all labor camps, and people worked in factories, on fields or wherever they were needed for the benefit of the Nazi war economy.

And so the day of September 5th, 1940 arrived! In accordance with the same Vienna pact that gave parts of Checko-Slovakia to Hungary in 1938-1939, Northern Transyvlania was given back to the Hungarian motherland. My family, like most Hungarian Jews considered itself Hungarian. Our native language, our whole culture, the language we dreamed in was Hungarian. Even when I went to Romanian schools, my mother made sure that I took lessons in Hungarian spelling, she considered it a crime not to spell correctly in your native tongue. My name Agnes, has no Romanian equivalent and my father's name Dezso was purely Hungarian. But Hungarians became Hitler's faithful allies, fascism became the law of the land, anti-Semitism official, government approved policy. Nevertheless, on the morning of September 5th, 1940, when Miklos Horthy, the Hungarian regent crossed the border on his white horse and we all listened to the Hungarian national anthem and the famous Transylvanian march played on the radio, my mother couldn't stop her tears from flowing. Later she told us, she cried because she knew that bad things will come, but we all knew she was lying, she cried because she was deeply touched, her people were coming! My mother, who contrary to my father and myself had no talent for languages, never learned Romanian. Actually, the only foreign language she spoke was German, but that also sounded very Hungarian, she also spoke a little English with the same accent.

The nuns in our school were all Hungarian (there are no Roman Catholic Romanians) so our "liberation" was cause for intense celebration. All of us students, even though school didn't start yet, were asked to come in, we were led to the main plaza to receive the glorious Hungarian army with songs and slogans and great enthusiasm.

Soon after these festivities, we found out that in grades 9 through 12 only one Jewish girl per grade was admitted. My very good friend and namesake, Agnes was the only one to get into 9th grade, her parents were the wealthiest and most socially prominent in our group. The law said a maximum of 6%, they were a little more generous in lower grades but I am sure overall they were way below

the admissible quota. Many of the nuns were great human beings and I am ;sure they were upset about our misfortune, but a priest by the name of Dr. Lajos Lorinz, the director of the school, was not too chagrined over the events.

The possibility of not being able to go to school was certainly considered the most tragic event in my life. Our town of about 60,000-70,000 people only had a Jewish elementary school, a junior high school was established in 1940, but we had no high school. If I couldn't get in to any school, I am sure my parents would have sent me to a city that had Jewish high school, but at that time I doubted that they would let their 14 year old only child go away.

Anyway, I was admitted to a protestant high school, that became a public school a year later. There were five of us girls: my friends Cathy, Eva and Anne and a brilliant poor girl named Gladys whom we didn't know prior to 1940. So life went on with minor changes. We didn't play tennis anymore since Jews couldn't belong to clubs, the local newspaper carried an article about Jews littering the beach with "goose-bones", so our parents decided to boycott the beach. For one year us kids went swimming off an orchard by the river, but the following year we went back to the beach. Our parents paid the annual dues for the upkeep, but they never went back anymore. Borders were closed for Jews, we couldn't travel, visiting family was the ;only possibility for vacations, we needed our beach badly! For a couple of summers we created a literary circle, about 15-16 boys and girls, I think I was the youngest one at 14 but my than 17 year old boyfriend was the leader. Each week there were two papers read, one by a boy and one by a girl, some classical music played and food - dancing. My first paper was of Edgar Allen Poe, my second one bout Michelangelo, 18 written pages, my father was <u>very</u> proud of me!!

My father's business of importing and exporting grains became state controlled and Jews were excluded. For a year we lived using our reserves. Eventually my father and his two partners found a couple of impoverished Hungarian noblemen as partners, basically front-men and they bought a small candy factory in Budapest. I clearly remember Count Mirbach and his secretary, Judith, coming for dinner, I am sure my mother was a little impressed, but she wouldn't admit it. When the Count declared that "every honest Hungarian whether he worships God with his head covered or uncovered, should pray for the defeat of Hitler", we were all very impressed.

My father spent a lot of time in Budapest, my mother and I went along during school holidays. We always stayed in the same hotel right on the Danube, one of the best hotels in Budapest. We were always well received, my father was a steady customer. Before the war started, I enjoyed the colorful array of people from all over the world. As a child I befriended indian diplomats and very proper british gentlemen. I remember one time when my mother

slapped my hand (very slightly) and refused to kiss it; a gentleman, who turned out to be the director of the company that owned the hotel, came by and offered me a box of chocolates in lieu of a hand kiss.

In the forties things changed, the foreigners were all Germans and Italians, mainly lots of German officers on R & R. I remember in 1943 my mother went home to take care of provisions and canning for the winter, my father took me to a play and since the hotel purchased our tickets, we were the only civilians sitting among German officers, who, being guests at the same hotel, had their tickets bought the same way. We did not have a nice time!

When my father was at home, he listened to all the foreign language news broadcasts of the B. B. C. - my cousin, George, and I counted 14 broadcasts one day. I still remember the free French one:"Radio Paris ment, Radio Paris ment, Radio Paris est Allemand"...

In 1942 the tide turned, as days, weeks, months, went by we all knew that it is only a matter of time before Hitler will be defeated. When the Italians capitulated, we knew the end is near, all we have to do is keep a low profile, abide by the laws and we'll make it. After all we are different, we don't speak Yiddish, we are Hungarians; this nightmare will soon be over and everything will go back to normal. Well, my life was still normal, I was seventeen in 1943, ready to start my senior year, a healthy, happy, normal young girl, looking forward to every tomorrow.

In the same period (1940-1943) we youngsters did a lot of volunteer work for the Jewish Community. They had a summer day camp for poor Jewish kids (mostly with fathers already in labor units with the army) at an orchard owned by Jews. We took care of the children playing games, serving food, etc.. We also helped poor Jewish families with husbands already drafted. I remember one incident with embarrassment. My friend Agnes and I bought some food (potatoes, onions, vegetables), we took it to this family and we saw the house (one room) was very dirty (by our standards). So we asked for a broom and proceeded to clean. Stupid little brats that we were, we never held a broom in our lives. I can still see the poor woman hovering in the corner with her children, wondering what the Hell we were up to.

As a vivid example of patriotism, I have to talk about my uncle Bela, my mother's oldest brother. Checko-Slovakia, where he lived, was the only real democracy in that part of the world, where they allowed minority parties. My uncle was vice president of the local Hungarian party, never showed a national Check flag on holidays, raised his two sons in such patriotic spirit that the younger son, George, cried and kissed the Hungarian train, when his father took him first time to Hungary at the age of eight. Steven, the older boy, had polio, at two years of age and had one leg paralyzed as a result. He was charming, bright and very handsome, played the

piano beautifully, loved poetry and probably became a dreamer. My uncle decided he has to go to law school, so he can take his practice over, in spite of the fact that Steve was not cut out to be a lawyer. He sat with his law books dreaming, he should have been finished way before 1944 but he wasn't.

George was probably the most perfectly turned out human being I ever knew. Tall, handsome, athletic, bright, with a wonderful sense of humor, he had everything going for him. In addition, he had such a definite talent for everything mechanical that by the time he was 16, if there was anything in his small town that the local professionals" couldn't fix, they just called George. With this talent, there was never any doubt about choosing a profession, he was going to be a mechanical engineer. So, in 1938, he started engineering school in Brno, Checko-Slovakia. The following year, when his home town was attached to Hungary, the otherwise tolerant Checks got angry and asked each student to declare his nationality. George told them he was Hungarian and they said he can go home! He applied to engineering school in Budapest, he was refused admittance, he was a Jew! He took up boxing, because "nobody is going to call me a dirty Jew, without having his jaws broken." One of my uncle's former schoolmates was the dean of a law school, he admitted both boys. George never wanted to be a lawyer, he only needed deferment from the army, he studied little and passed his exams with ease. My uncle, the great Hungarian patriot, was excluded from the bar and was not allowed to practice, he was a Jew! He said "the Checks couldn't make me love them in 20 years, it took the Hungarians only 3 months to make me love the Checks." We retained our sense of humor!

In spite of everything that was going on that we knew about, and all the horrible things that we didn't know about, my life was still a happy one. We were a despised and persecuted minority, there wasn't a moment in our lives that we weren't aware of that, but we had loving families, plenty of friends, we went to school like everybody else, we were young, healthy and our optimism grew day by day. Our schoolmates were mostly nice to us, I don't remember any cruelty or even discriminatory remarks. Our teachers treated us well, it wasn't easy for them not to since we were all excellent students, well behaved, cooperative, generally the dream of every educator. I still remember though a small incident with shame. We had a so=called "sport circle" in school, where participation was voluntary and the activity was mostly gymnastics. Only two of the five Jewish girls, Eva and myself participated. One day in 1943, our young physical education teacher shared with us the wonderful news that the national gymnastics team from Budapest is having a performance in town and she was able to obtain tickets for the members of the sport circle, but she had one less than needed. Without even thinking, she had the solution: each girl gets a ticket except Eva and I and the remaining one ticket will be decided by drawing between the two of us. Both our names were put in a bowl and mine was drawn. At that time there was no

question in my mind, I happily went to the show, Eva of course would have done the same, but today I feel ashamed, I should have not gone!

On March 18th, 1944, my father came home after a couple of weeks stay in Budapest and on March 19th the German army occupied Hungary. I mention these two events in one sentence, because my father immediately said that Budapest is the place to be, since it's always easier to hide in a big city where people don't know you. Unfortunately, Jews were not allowed to travel anymore.

And so, on March 19th, 1944, our world collapsed. Practically all the anti-Jewish laws instituted by the Nazis in Germany and occupied countries came into effect over night. One that effected all of us was the yellow star of David, compulsory to be worn by every Jewish person over the age of six anywhere outside the home. We were still going to school; tanks with German soldiers and S.S. were lining our streets. I felt that my yellow star said: "Here I am, I am Jewish, you can spit on me, you can beat me up, you can shoot me, the law is on your side, nobody will stand up to defend me, it's too late now!" The emotion I experienced was shear terror. A few of our Hungarian schoolmates walked with us to school the first day -- we were grateful.

An army hospital that was brought back from the Russian front was installed in the building of the Jewish hospital on our street, that was evacuated for this purpose. The army doctors were billeted into private homes. We had two young physicians originally, but one of them left and Dr. Aladar Solymossy staid with us. Since Jews were not allowed to have radios, we gave ours, a big, old fashioned set, to Dr. Solymossy, who, after a few days, invited my father to listen to the strictly forbidden B.B.C. news in his room with him.

These people all experienced the horrors of the war and they all knew they lost, they wanted peace, they wanted it to end. I didn't see Dr. Solymossy and his wife, Irene, who came to stay with him, since 1944, but I remember them fondly especially Irene. She was a warm, decent person, who readily offered and came with me to the center of the town, when I was too afraid to walk with my yellow star.

The Nazis took eighty adult Jewish men as hostages and my father was one of them. The Gestapo came to search our house and they were known to plant incriminating ;evidence. Dr. Solymossy put on his uniform and followed the Gestapo officer step by step through the house. The hostages were held in one Jewish home that they took over, the Gestapo threatened them every day that if any of their family members will hide or escape, the respective hostage will be shot instantly. Through the Hungarian police, they made sure that we, the family, knew about this threat. The Jewish community had to provide food for the hostages. It was arranged,

that children of the prisoners taking turns took the meals to them. We were not allowed beyond the gate, but they worked out some system that always the fathers whose son or daughter happened to be there came around for a moment to see us. On May first, I had my oral exams, high school graduation was a very serious affair, and I remember my father asking me how I did and his smile when I said "straight A-s."

I turned 18 on May 3rd and the ghetto started the same day.

Red roses arrived from my on and off boyfriend with a note: "With the occasion of the double celebration (birthday and graduation) and with the remote hope of seeing you again in the distant future, with love." This note told me something else too. He converted to catholicism some years back, probably influenced by his mother, who also converted and became a religious fanatic. When I read this note, I knew that he is somewhere in a catholic retreat and vowed to become a priest. I also knew that if they keep him there he will never renege on his promise, no matter what motivated it. They kicked him out a couple of weeks later and he joined his parents and the rest of us in the ghetto.

On the morning of May the 3rd our young rabbi and Sunday school teacher, Dr. Sandor Herzog, a brilliant scholar and great human being came to pick us up, a handful of Jewish students, to help him organize the registration of the people taken into the ghetto.

The ghetto: they evacuated an area of about 3 square blocks of all the non Jewish people who lived there (a fairly large percentage of Jewish families lived in the same area) and they brought in 18,000 Jews from all surrounding towns and villages and, of course, the rest of urban Jews. My girlfriend, Anne's uncle, a local dentist and his wife had a home in this neighborhood, so my family and several others arranged with them to move in when our time comes. They came to take us by streets, our turn didn't come until the middle of May. Meanwhile, we worked in the ghetto filling out registration forms for the incoming people. In the midst of tragic events your mind also retains the ridiculous. One night, on our way home from the ghetto, a neighbor boy said: "Aggie, we have complete papers for a twenty year old Hungarian factory worker for my sister, Lilly, but she doesn't want to leave, do you want them?" You know what I answered? - "No, first of all I wouldn't go without my parents and second, who would ever believe that I am a factory worker?" Spoiled little stupid brat that I was, I thought of my answer often during my twelve hour night shift as a slave laborer in a German ammunition factory.

They did let the hostages out after the ghetto started, but by that time it was to late to attempt anything.

They came one morning, the Gestapo and Hungarian police. First they took all our valuables away, previously lots of Jewish men

were beaten by the Gestapo, to make sure that they didn't hide anything. I have to insert here that my uncle, Bela, (I found this out after the war) was beaten so badly that he died on the train on the way to Auschwitz.

We were allowed to take a limited amount of clothes, mattresses, food and other belongings into the ghetto. Twenty of us arranged our mattresses on the floor in the Kaufmann's living room. The Jewish Council was organized, I remember my father was in charge of "other matters", whatever that was. As soon as everybody was in (we were among the last ones) they started sending people away 3000 at a time. The word that was used was "resettlement". We were going to be resettled to Germany, where we will work wherever we are needed and we will live in camps as families. Only a few items of clothing were allowed to be taken and some food for the train ride.

About a week before we left, my mother and many other ladies were in the kitchen trying to prepare dinner for their families, when someone accidentally dropped a tea cattle with boiling water. My mother was standing nearby and she burned one foot pretty badly. Our family doctor, also a resident of the ghetto, took immediately care of her injury but a week later, when we were evacuated with the last group of 3000 people, she was still wearing slippers on one foot. Since the hospital went with the same transport, my father arranged for my mother to travel in the same cattle car with ambulatory patients and doctors. This was very important, since they were only 30 to the same size of car that we shared with approximately 150 people.

I remember standing in a circle with my father and lots of other people, waiting for our transportation to the railway station. The chief of the local police was standing with us and the s.o.b. said: "Mind my words, you'll learn to appreciate the Hungarian police." Like it was our own choice to leave. The miserable train ride in the cattle car, where we were so crowded that all of us couldn't even sit on the floor at the same time, we had to alternate sitting and standing! There was a narrow crack in the wall, my father looked out at a railway station where we stopped and he knew that we are in trouble; we were going East towards Poland, not West to Germany.

We spent three days on this horrible journey, but we were lucky, much luckier than others, once a day they gave us some water.

On the third morning, my father shaved, he knew he has to look good. He always knew what to do, why didn't he survive??

We arrived to Auschwitz on June the 3rd, 1944, 3 days before "D" day!

The door of our cattle car was suddenly opened, men in striped uniforms were shouting at us to get off quickly. The noise level was unbelievable and everything was totally chaotic: people shouting in many languages, whistles blowing, dogs barking and underneath all, the sound of running footsteps. We were not allowed to take our knapsacks with our few belongings, we were told everything will be sent to us later. I had my mother's one shoe in my hand, I was going to run to the front of the train, where I knew the two hospital cars were, I was certain she will be able to put shoes on now. I was stopped by an S.S. man and told that I cannot go there now but I will see my mother later. In the big confusion I found myself separated from my father, realizing that men and women were separated. I found myself in a column of women, about five to each row. Our next door neighbor, Anne, a woman in her thirties was next to me, holding her aged mother by the arm. As we walked on, kept in line by several S.S. men and women, we arrived to a point where a young S.S. officer stood. His uniform was so perfectly pressed, his boots were shining, he held a riding crop in his hand that he used directing people to the right or left, never uttering a word but whistling a tune all this time. We did not know where we were and even if we did the name Auschwitz had no meaning to us. We did not know who the man was who decided whether we'll live or die, but even if we knew the name Dr. Joseph Mengele would have been meaningless to us. It was June the 3rd, 1944, the camps must have been full, so, only about 300 of the 3000 of us made it to the right into the Camps with a small chance for survival. When I saw our neighbor, Anne, and her mother going to the left, I wanted to follow them, but I was sent in the opposite direction. Why? I have no idea! Lots of my friends, boys and girls, healthy, young people between 16 and 20 never made it to the right. Of course, older people, people who didn't look fit, children, mothers of children, people who were holding on to an older person, pregnant women and people in the hospital cars never had a chance. It was so late in the war, even the most fanatical Nazi had to know that they lost it, they didn't have enough trains for their own troops, but murdering Jews was always first priority with the Nazis. Why did they have to kill my 80 year old grandmother and all the innocent children? My cousin, Erna, with her beautiful seven year old son, Peter, went to the gas chambers, my cousin, Anne, also had a seven year old boy, George, but when they arrived they asked doctors to stand aside, so while she followed orders, George went to the left with his grandparents, my Aunt Rose and her husband Anton. If there is a God why would he let this happen? I remember my mother's words about the "Chosen People": "I wish he would choose someone else."

Of course, in the morning of June the 3rd, 1944, I did not ask all these questions, I was told I'll see my parents later and I believed it.

I remember walking towards the camps with my friends Cathy, Eva and Agnes, there were barbed wires to our right, unbeknowned to us with

high voltage electricity. There were women behind these wire fences, their heads were shaved, they looked miserable and they were shouting at us to throw food over the fence, but we didn't have any. We looked at each other with my friends and we were firmly convinced that these women are either insane or criminals. Only about 100 yards behind us we could see black smoke rising towards the sky and we smelled something that we couldn't identify, it was burning flesh, but our minds still would not understand that one human being could treat an other human being in the manner those women were treated, only because that person was born with a different religion or maybe just had one Jewish grandparent. We did not know that we just arrived to the biggest Death Factory of Modern Times. Our first stop was at the disinfectation center. As we stood in line to get in, I turned around and saw the men from our transport. We were not allowed to talk, but with a silent movement of his lips, my father asked "Where is your mother?" and I silently answered "I don't know." If I live to be a hundred, I will never forget the total desperation on his face. I know now with absolute certainty that he already had an idea what "going to the left"meant. Besides the fact that he had above average insight I am basing this knowledge on the fact that he was fluent in both German and French and the prisoners who helped us off the train, were of those nationalities. Somebody must have warned him to do all he can to look fit.

As we got into this building we had to strip off all our clothes, we walked naked among the staring S.S. men and women and prisoners of both genders who worked there. Our heads were shaved, our clothes were taken, we got one miserable garment, a pair of panties and we were ready for our new life. I don't know if anybody can understand this, I don't even know if I understand it myself, but my friends, Cathy, Eva and I looked at each other and we looked so totally ridiculous without hair, that we burst out in uncontrollable laughter. What did we know? We expected to see our parents on Sunday! As we got into the camp, Camp "C" in our case, we were each given a postcard, that we had to address to a non Jewish friend or neighbor. We all had to write the same thing: "We arrived to camp, we are together, we're working and doing fine." Oh, yes, they did keep up the charade even in June of 1944.

The camps in Auschwitz - Birkenau: barracks surrounded by barbed wire fences that killed you if you touched them, watch towers visible. All around, smoke rising from the chimneys of the crematorium day and night, not a blade of grass, not one bird singing, not one human being between you and your murderers. We did not come from a classless society, we came from a world where your social status was determined by birth, wealth, education, success or the lack of it, but there is no society in the world where social differences, standard of living was so totally in comparable for members of the elite and the rest of us pariahs. I am not talking about the Nazis, I am talking about prisoners with status, with seniority and the rest of us newcomers. The highest

ranking prisoner was the Kapo, a person in charge of a whole section like Camp "C", comprising thousands of people. She was so high up in the hierarchy that we only saw her during role calls when she accompanied the S.S.. The member of the camp nobility that we lived with was the "Blockalteste" the "Barrack Elder", a woman in charge of one barrack. These were hardened women, mostly from Poland and Slovakia, veterans who built Auschwitz, they suffered for years, they saw their loved ones die, they worked under extremely harsh conditions while we "Hungarian Jews" had a good life. They hated us and they showed it, their first cruelty was telling us that our loved ones are going up in smoke over there, they pointed towards the crematoriums. They stole part of our food and we were starving, but I think they felt they were entitled to privileges, they suffered enough. I remember one time our bunk bed was right next to the Blockalteste's room, there was a crack in the wall and we watched how she and her friends were making and frying meat balls using the sausage that they stole from our miserable little portions given to us about once every other week. The smell made us almost crazy, we were so hungry! I think the difference between the lifestyle of a Blockalteste and a new prisoner was greater than that between a King and a pauper.

But, constant hunger was nothing compared to our complete sense of hopelessness and isolation.

We stood roll calls every day as early as 3-4 in the morning and again at night. During these roll calls, we were given our miserable food that consisted of some lukewarm water with rotten vegetables, called soup, unsweetened surrogate coffee, a slice of bread containing mainly sawdust and once in a blue moon some margarine, marmalade, cheese or sausage. Both the soup and the coffee were given to us in one pot for five people, we had to drink as we stood there one after the other. The main function of the roll calls was selection. If you were sick or pale, or looked unfit or if they just needed numbers, they took you away and as days went by we realized that the cruel stories were true, nobody ever came back. There was only one place to go: the gas chambers.

Some barracks didn't have bunk beds, the prisoners slept on the floor. Our barrack had three story bunk beds, seven of us slept on each level. We could only sleep on our sides, if one person turned, we all had to turn. Of course, there was nothing on the beds, just the bare hard board.

Auschwitz, besides being a Death Camp was also a pool for labor camps. My father knew he has to get out as soon as possible, he volunteered at the first opportunity. Somebody threw a small piece of lumber over the fence with messages written from fathers to daughters. I got my message: "To Aggie Diamantstein kisses from her father." There was one barrack that had non enclosed toilets, more like outhouses one next to the other, no privacy, in the middle there were a row of cold water faucets. We did the best we

could to clean up and wash our one piece of underwear. Luckily, because of the drastic change in diet, we did not get our periods. I was so inexperienced that every time I attempted to wash my panties somebody who couldn't stand watching my clumsiness, always did it for me. In the second week of July, after seven weeks in Camp "C", I got sick. I was running a fever, felt miserable, but my friends tried to protect me during roll calls, standing in front of me, making me invisible. After three days, however, there was nothing they could do, I had the measles, visible all over my body.

That day, in late July, when they took me away, my friends cried for me, they thought they'll never see me again. There was also a very mild scarlet fever epidemic in the camp, several people were taken away prior to my departure, as we later found out they were all murdered, since at that time they didn't have a ward for them in the hospital. By August, they had one in the same hospital where I was taken and everybody survived the disease itself, they all had very mild cases. I was lucky, since they already had a room ;for people with measles. This was a very primitive hospital in a camp directly adjacent to ours. I knew through the grapevine that my Cousin Anne is working in this hospital so I asked Dr. Paula, a kind pediatrician from my cousin's hometown Kolozsvar, to let Anne know that I am there. Measles at 18 can be rough on you, especially since the previous seven weeks of starvation didn't exactly leave you with reserves. After the disease itself was over I kept running on and off a very high fever for many weeks. Anne kept me in the hospital working as a nurse, thereby saving my life. Mengele came to the hospital daily, visiting every single room, including the room where the nurses slept. Only one night-nurse was allowed to be in bed during the day, so when I was too sick to work, they made the night-nurse get up and told Mengele that I am the one on night duty. Actually, there wasn't too much nursing required since, except for the epidemics, they just filled the beds up for show, those who really needed medical attention were sent to the gas chambers. Eventually, I learned to bandage with paper bandages and I even got better at sweeping the ward. My Cousin Ditha and Anne's sister Eva also worked in the hospital, where physical conditions were much better than in the barracks. Instead of seven people sleeping on a double cot, two of us shared a narrow single one. Our soup was the same as before but at least it was still warm when we got it. The biggest advantage was that we did not have roll calls. For these small physical comforts, however, we paid dearly! Mengele came to the hospital every day and at least once a week, sometimes twice, he gave his orders as to how many bodies he wants for the gas chambers. He would say "I want at least 140 or at least 150 by Friday." The doctors complied, lining up the patients, he did the selections. The one doctor that fought for every human life was my cousin Anne. She is a wonderful human being and I think the knowledge that she lost her only child made her really brave, she didn't very much care about what happened to her. Interestingly enough, she was the only one that Mengele had some respect for. Everybody else was just "Hey you", but Anne was

always addressed as "Doctor Anne."

Periodically, they brought 30-40 women over from Camp "C", only to be taken away next day to the gas chambers.

Once I almost had the chance to save a human life. This is what happened: One day, one of the girls who worked in the hospital came to tell me that a group was brought in from Camp "C" and somebody wanted to see me. I ran to the third barrack, where the group of about 30 women was held. The girl who sent for me was my age, her name was Agnes Fulop, she wasn't a friend but we went to Sunday school together in junior high school. She hugged me, she cried, she knew exactly what the group's destination is and she asked me that if I make it out and I ever see her mother, to tell her what happened (her mother went to the left, but I guess she still had hopes.) I ran to my cousin and it just so happened that they found a solution. There was a very young girl in coma, that Mengele did not know about, as a matter of fact, she was dead by the time the group was taken away next day. The exchange was done and it worked! I felt like playing God but I was also very happy, I saved a life!

Agnes stayed in the hospital for three days, she wasn't ill, but the rest was good for her. When they discharged her she was very unhappy because it was a rainy, cold November day, nevertheless she was ready to leave in the next hour. I went to the storage, stole a flannel pajama top, but when I came back to give it to her, she very happily announced that she talked the doctor into letting her stay an other day. An hour later Mengele and his group of murderers arrived, they evacuated the hospital by sending 600 of the 680 patients to the gas chambers. Agnes was one of them, and so ended my almost successful attempt to save a human life!

In addition to having to guide people to the trucks, when Mengele's weekly or bi-weekly orders were filled, we also had to put dead bodies on the same trucks. I wasn't prepared, I had no training for this, but when your only other choice is to step on the same truck and go to the same destination, you do what you're told to do.

This hospital was a small one, consisting of three barracks, connected by one hallway across. Experiments requiring surgery were conducted in the main hospital on the other side of the tracks. There was only one procedure that was done at our place: inducement of premature birth. If somehow a woman survived until her sixth month of pregnancy, they brought her in, induced labor and the S.S. killed the baby immediately.

Dr. Joseph Mengele was a cold blooded murderer, who took shear delight in what he was doing. When the hospital was evacuated, one of the nurses begged him to save her mother. He asked: "How old is your mother?", "She is forty" was the answer; "Your mother lived

enough" - and he sent her off to her death.

I don't know how you can ever explain the horrors of a death camp to anyone that didn't live through it, but for those of us who experienced it, it just can never be forgotten. There was no future, there was no hope, you only lived for the short term. The definition of real hunger is, when you cannot think of anything but food, when your memories are all food related. For some reason, when I thought of home, especially at the beginning, I did not think of happy, sunny days; I always daydreamed of cold, unpleasant, rainy afternoons, when I felt depressed (most probably only because it rained) and I curled up with a good book under my soft, warm, pink blanket in my equally pink, real "girl-room." That "unhappiness" just seemed so wonderful in the middle of all the horrors of Auschwitz.

Sometimes, male prisoners came to a women's camp to perform some jobs but we were not allowed to talk to each other. Besides Jews, there were non-Jewish political prisoners, common criminals, homosexuals and gypsies in Auschwitz. Except for a group of gypsies that were murdered, only the Jews were destined for the gas chambers.

Once, a French electrician, a political prisoner, was standing on a ladder in the hospital, fixing the lights. I talked to him once before, he knew I speak French, so when I walked by, he started to talk about news of the war, that we had no access to. Unfortunately, this high ranking S.S. woman saw us and she hit me pretty hard with her stick.

The elite of women prisoners, especially those who worked in the kitchens and managed to be pretty well fed, managed to have relations with male prisoners.

Brave doctors performed countless abortions under very difficult circumstances, risking their own lives in an attempt to save somebody else's. They were usually paid with food.

I did have a couple of offers while I worked in the hospital. One came from a young Frenchman from Algeria; he promised to give me food if I go with him to an empty barrack. The other proposition came from a Polish Jew, when we took some blankets to be disinfected. He actually gave me a pair of shoes (mine were just stolen) and some underwear and promised more if I just go with him to this empty room. I declined both offers, I guess I just wasn't hungry enough. I had one totally different encounter: he was a Greek Jew, a student at the Sorbonne, tall and so terribly thin. He saw me through the window in the hospital as they were passing by on their way to work. One day he managed to stop by just outside the third barrack and he asked somebody to get me. All he wanted me to do was to wave to him in the morning if I see him go by. He was a newcomer, a pariah like me, in pretty bad shape. I

never saw him again, I don't think he survived.

That day in November of 1944 when those of us who worked in the hospital stood outside helplessly watching the evacuation, watching how another six hundred people were sent off to die, when we were told to start walking in the same direction where the trucks disappeared, we all thought we were going to the same destination. Apparently, we didn't, and in a short time we found ourselves on the other side of the tracks, the "left" side of our arrival in the so-called F.K.L. (Frauen Konzentration Lager or Women's Concentration Camp). This camp housed most of the non-Jewish, female prisoners and the largest hospital. The gas chambers and crematorium were also very close by. They directed us to a barrack and the next morning, when I woke up, my shoes were stolen. A few days later, my cousin, Anne, who worked in the big hospital now, presented me with a pair of used, but very good boots, an unbelievable treasure. Many months later, after the war ended, I found out that she received eight portions of sausage from a Slovakian girl, a kitchen worker, as payment for an abortion. She got the boots from a prisoner who worked where the clothes were sorted from incoming transports, in exchange for the sausage. She just saved my health, maybe my life, for the second time.

We did some odd jobs around the camp, carried big barrels of soup, did some clean up jobs, etc.. Strange things happened: They "evacuated" a hospital barrack, disinfected and painted it and moved the handful of us, former hospital workers, in. We had individual cots and there were even some tables, a totally unheard of luxury. We were also excused from roll calls. One night, Mengele came in while we ate our piece of bread and marmalade for dinner, sitting on our cots, and he told us that we should sit at the tables and eat like "people". We didn't understand, all of a sudden we were "people" not prisoners! Our group was referred to as "available nurses and doctors". I always lied about my age, whenever he asked me, I said I am twenty, to make it more believable that I am a nurse.

It was sometime in the second half of November, when the gas chambers and crematorium were closed. A group of people came in and got into the camps without selection, we actually saw children. I found out much later from my Cousin Anne, that, in spite of the fact that the children were better fed than the adults, very few of them survived until January 1945, when the camp was liberated by the Soviet Army. But I am getting ahead of myself.

It was around the 27th of November when we were told that twenty of us, mostly nurses except for a couple of doctors, are going to leave Auschwitz. We were going into various work camps where jobs were waiting for us in camp clinics.

Before we left, we went through a last selection. I had some kind of a skin rash, little red spots on both sides of my stomach, they

were of unknown origins and appeared and disappeared for about two months. It just so happened that I had a few of these spots at the time of this last selection. My Cousin Anne warned me that if Mengele notices them, I should tell him that it is and allergy to cheese, I get these spots every time I eat cheese. He did stop me, I said what I was told to say, and he let me go. An unknown skin disease could have meant death; Anne saved my life again.

So, twenty of us left guarded by seven S.S. men. We traveled on regular passenger trains in a separate compartment.

Again, how can I describe what seeing civilians, after almost six months of life in Auschwitz meant? It was a totally unrealistic sensation, like coming from an other planet; there was life outside the death camp; people went about their everyday business. Of course, we were not allowed to talk to anyone.

Our group looked relatively good, we were all in good health, we had short hair, since our heads were never shaved again, in my case since June the 3rd. We were all dressed for the outside world, in decent winter coats, scarfs on our heads and acceptable footwear.

We arrived to a camp in the city of Braunschweig, a non-Jewish women's working camp. There were two Polish women in our group, a young girl of upper class origins and an older woman who acted as her slave and protector, they were both openly anti-Semitic. S.S. women arrived from various camps to take us where nurses were needed. I was hoping to be able to go with my cousin, Eva, but it wasn't going to be. When an S.S. woman came to take one nurse to Salzwedel, I had no idea where Salzwedel was, but I volunteered, before they arbitrarily assigned one of us. I was just tired of waiting.

The S.S. woman who came to take me was one of the meanest ones in the camp, as I later found out.

Our journey from Braunschweig to Salzwedel was very interesting. We started walking towards the railway station around eight o'clock at night, on December 7th and on our way there was an air raid, which I enjoyed, she didn't. Our train didn't leave until after midnight, so she had two choices: admit it that I am a prisoner and stay outside in the cold on the platform with me or pretend that I am a regular person and take me with her into the waiting room - cafe, the only warm place. She chose the latter! When the waiter came and everybody ordered the only available thing, some fake coffee, she had to pay for mine too. This alone might have killed her, but what followed was more than she could stand: a young German regular army officer sat down next to me and struck up a conversation (my German was good at that time). After about five minutes, she got up, called him aside and probably made him aware of my subhuman status. Next morning we arrived to Salzwedel, where I was taken to the camp office and formally registered. This was

the first time that anybody asked what my name was and other vital statistics since I left home. Next, I was assigned a cot in a barrack and was taken to the clinic where I was introduced to the nurse. Before I even started my job I lost it, since the nurse's sister wanted it and apparently she had "connections".

The S.S. officer in charge of the camp came to see me and warned me not to tell anybody about gas chambers and crematoriums, since all the women in this camp left Auschwitz only a few weeks after their arrival and supposedly did not know what's going on. Probably, in order to keep me more confined, he assigned me to work in the potato and vegetable pealing room. This was a wonderful job, even if the vegetables were the kind that you normally feed to animals, but we could eat some raw as we were pealing them. We also managed to cook one potato for each person most every day. This diet was so satisfactory that I gave my soup away every day to a young girl from Poland, who in turn heated a pot of water for me, so I could wash up late at night when we got back to the barrack. We worked 14-15 hour days, compared to the 12 hour shifts in the ammunition factory where everybody else worked. My wonderful job ended on January 31 (I remember the date, it was my mother's birthday!) when all able bodied women were sent to the factory.

Salzwedel was a small working camp of 1200 women; all, but four belgian ladies, were Jewish. We were from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria and Germany. There was only one person that I knew from my home town, she was about three years my senior. The S.S. man in charge was a sadist, who used to beat women up fiercely if he caught them trying to steal rotten vegetables or potato peals from the garbage bins. We were still prisoners in a subhuman status, but there was a big difference: there were no gas chambers or crematorium; our lives, at least to our knowledge, were not threatened daily.

Since I talked about the monstrous crimes of the Nazis, committed mainly by the S.S., I have to talk now about a kind and warm human being. Anneliese Schmidt was and S.S. woman, 24 years of age. She supervised the kitchen staff and, while I worked in the potato pealing room, she came in daily, mainly to chit-chat with our "foreman", Paula, a middle aged austrian, Jewish actress. There was an 18 year old girl from Poland among us, who was an epileptic. I've never seen seizures before or since that time, but they're not a pretty sight. Every time she had a seizure, someone went to get Anneliese, she came running, held her in her arms, caressed her, talked to her until the seizure was over.

Anneliese Schmidt, former S.S. woman, caring, warm, wonderful lady, who managed to be a human being in a sea of inhumanity, wherever you are I salute you!

The ammunition factory where we worked was an easy walking distance from the camp. We worked 12 hour shifts, 6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.,

or 6:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M.. We manufactured bullets. I worked at a sorting machine. One foreman was a young German but some of the mechanics were so-called "free" French workers. Of course, they weren't free at all but they were a lot freer than we were and they managed to be informed about the events of the war. Through a French mechanic, Joseph, we learned about the Allied advances, the apparent defeat of the Nazis, etc.. A bullet would be stuck in my machine and, after I let it run empty as long as I could get away with, I called Joseph. He would stand facing my machine, fixing it as slowly as he could get away with. I would stand right behind him and he would mumble to the machine: "Soixante kilometres de ~~Paris~~" BERLIN (60 kilometers from ~~Paris~~ BERLIN).

Once our German foreman, Emil, brought two large carrots and snuck one in my drawer and one in my neighbor's drawer. We were nearing the end, I guess he needed references. Once, another German foreman, an ugly little jerk, promised me bread and butter if I come to his office after midnight, apparently he didn't mind soiling his pure Aryan blood. Again I stayed away; either I wasn't hungry enough or my puritanical education paid off!!

Starting in February, Allied airplanes flew over the factory every night with clockwork punctuality at 8:15 P.M.. At eight o'clock we all started to go to the bathroom, we knew we'll be in the air raid shelter in 15 minutes. The camp did not have any shelters, we just stayed in the barracks.

Whether in the shelter or in the barracks, the only emotion I experienced was pure joy, never a moment of fear! Our friends were coming! (Sure, our friends could have easily bombed the railroads leading to Auschwitz much earlier, my parents would have survived...).

Towards the end of March, we had no materials to work with anymore. Some people were detailed to do clean up work at the railway station that was bombed, the rest of us did some busy work in the factory.

One of the last days in March, a miracle occurred! I was in the camp, the windows of our barrack were wide open and, all of a sudden, I saw a large group of women walking, in and among them my Cousin Eva, whom I left in Braunschweig almost four months earlier, and whose whereabouts I didn't know. I jumped through the window (while somebody stole my blouse that I just washed) and caught up with her. We were very, very happy to see each other. She came with the first group whose camp was evacuated, several more groups followed later, including a large group of French women.

A few days later the S.S. left, cutting off our water and electricity, but than they came back, everything was pretty chaotic. There was no more work in the factory, we stayed in the camp, the allied planes flied very low and we cheered! A couple of

times, somebody said our liberators are coming, but these were just rumors and the camp remained closed. The camp commandant, who lived outside the camp and came in once a day for inspection, was an other human being in S.S. uniform. In his presence there was never physical punishment allowed and I don't know if he was aware or not of his underlings sadistic behavior. We found out later that he had standing orders to destroy all of us before liberation.

In the morning of April 14, 1945, the most beautiful morning in the history of the human race, I was lying on the ground near a fence, reading a book that I found, probably left behind by one of the S.S.. All of a sudden, there was a big commotion, someone yelled out: "They're coming". Everybody ran towards the gate. For about five minutes I didn't get up; I was afraid of one more disappointment, but then I started to run with the rest of them.

By the time I got there, the gate was opened by French prisoners of war, whose camp was on the other side of the town. We just walked out and soon we saw our liberators, American tanks, American army. The whole scene was entirely unrealistic: a dream come true that you didn't even dare dream anymore. A soldier driving a jeep gave me a box of artificial honey and a pack of Lucky Strikes. I was just carried by the crowd. I had no will of my own. First I was swept in a shoe store where a former Russian prisoner of war was standing on a ladder throwing shoes to the crowd. I caught a box with a pair of brown walking shoes, exactly my size. Next the masses took me along to a fabric store where someone handed a whole lot of blue cotton fabric to me. Finally, I found my Cousin Eva and we all went back towards the camp, sat on the grass by the river and enjoyed our first moments of freedom.

Since there still was a war on and we had no idea how to get food, we were very lucky because a group of former French prisoners of war, mostly Jewish men, organized our supplies and took care of running the camp for the first two weeks. My first American friend was George Griffith from Texas; he was driving a French lady around who was looking for French women prisoners. He took me several times to the hospital to visit my older lady friend Mrs. Annie Gluck. After a few days, he went off to war, driving a tank this time, but he came back a couple of days later, brought back some brand new underwear (what super luxury!) that I divided among six of us girls sharing one room; he also brought a pale blue cellophane raincoat that I kept. I didn't see him again, but I am sure he made it, the war was just about over. A nice, kind man, always helping others.

Two weeks after liberation, we were moved about two kilometers outside the City, near a former military airport. We lived in two-story brick buildings, six of us still shared a fairly large room, we still slept two to a cot, but we had hot showers, all the wonderful soap we wanted and we were well fed. One of my friends started to work as an interpreter in a big kitchen that fed about

four thousand people. When I went to see her and the American officer in charge discovered that I too speak English, he immediately asked me to come work as an interpreter. These, of course, were unpaid jobs, but we were so happy to be able to do anything to help our liberators. Our new camp was a D.P. (displaced persons) camp containing 18,000 people. The war ended on May the 8th, all the Western nations and Czechoslovakia sent buses to pick up the former prisoners even though most of those nations did not collaborate with the Nazis in their deportation. Hungary, faithful ally of Hitler, did nothing! At the end of the war, when camps all over Poland, Austria and Germany were liberated, lists of survivors were compiled and circulated among camps. I anxiously checked all these lists for my father's name. Since I knew he left Auschwitz at a very early stage. Not finding his name did not really matter that much, I stubbornly stuck to my belief that he survived and is waiting for me at home. Since I've known for a long time what my mother's fate was, I think I just absolutely had to hang on to the hope that at least one of my parents survived.

I more or less belong to the youngest group of survivors, very few people under 18 got out alive. When I was working in this kitchen, there were always a couple of women in their forties who babied and spoiled me, like bringing me sweets, sewing for me, etc.. I was lucky in never having a birthday in captivity. For my 19th birthday, on May the 3rd, one of the ladies baked a cake and a nice boy from Milwaukee, only three years older than I, brought me a bunch of flowers. I felt human again! The British replaced the Americans. My new friend, Tom, was ten years my senior, he loved me and treated me like a little sister. I trusted him and he deserved it. I remember how he tried to hide the first magazines that showed those horrible pictures of the liberated concentration camps.

Eventually, one day in July of 1945, we found out that Salzwedel will belong to the Soviet zone, the British will leave and the Soviet Army will take over. Some horror stories were circulated about Russian soldiers raping young girls. Obviously, we were scared but not enough to leave, since we rationalized that staying in the Soviet zone our chances to get home faster are increasing. Nevertheless, the first night we pushed our triple wardrobe and a big table with six chairs on top against the door for protection. Nobody tried to get in, we were safe. We befriended a couple of women who came from the part of Hungary that belonged to Yugoslavia before 1940. Since they spoke the Serb language, they arranged for a few of us to get attached to a group of Yugoslavian P.O.W.'s located in the same camp. Again, we felt that this will insure our getting home in a safer and speedier way. We had to tell the Russian authorities that we all came from Yugoslavia. Actually, we gave them the names of our actual home towns and added Yugoslavia. Nobody challenged us, I suppose geography wasn't their forte.

On our way home we spent a few weeks in Tangermunde and again in Forst.

In the first town we were given a room in the home of a German family. We talked to them, they denied any knowledge of the horrible events that took place in Germany for close to a decade.

I have to mention here our loyal "body guards", four Serb peasants, former P.O.W.'s, who occupied the room next to us and protected us from any possible Russian invaders. Actually, we only had one, probably harmless, very young Russian soldier who used to come in, sit down and just stare at us for about an hour without uttering a word. Poor kid, maybe he was homesick and women reminded him of family. There was one "old lady" in our group, probably late forties, one woman in her thirties, the rest of us between nineteen and twenty four.

On August 29th, we were all loaded in a train, cattle cars again, but with enough room to lie down, as part of a large Yugoslavian group of former P.O.W.'s and other "displaced persons".

We arrived to Prague next day, where we parted company, most people went to Yugoslavia, while our little group headed towards Hungary and Romania.

Our reception in Prague was touching. In spite of food shortages, they managed to feed us at the train station, spending money for one day was given to us by some organization, we rode free of charge on streetcars and, at the restaurant, when they found out where we came from, they served us food without the obligatory ration cards. Next day, when we arrived to Budapest, the contrast was real sharp: nobody gave a damn, they wouldn't even let us ride a streetcar from the railway station to our destination.

My mother had several cousins in Budapest, so I headed for the one that lived closest to the station taking Eva with me. I found the women: Sarah and Rose and Sarah's daughter, Agnes, the men: Hugo and Michael, were shot into the Danube by the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow Cross. I remember when they told me about some eighty year old relative who died, I thought they're crazy for being so concerned, I felt like shouting: "don't tell me about old ladies dying a natural death, don't you know where I came from?".

In Budapest they seemed to know already about most survivors and nobody heard from my father, but I refused to give up hope. During my two days stay in Budapest, I bumped into a young man from my home town and when I asked him about my father he thought for a minute and said: "I think I saw him, I just remember seeing his reddish gray hair". I am sure he did not want to deceive me, the memory was there, but it was over a year old.

On September 2, 1945, I got home. I went to my parents house, that

was not only empty of furniture but everything that was movable was taken: fixtures, sinks, door knobs, stoves, etc.. When I was standing there in the middle of that emptiness and cried, I learned something that will stay with me for the rest of my life: nothing material is worth shedding one tear for, the only thing worth crying for is human life, because only human life is irreplaceable. I went to our next door neighbors house, a few minutes later my mother's best friend's husband walked in. We hugged, cried, he lost his wife and only child, a sixteen year old daughter, I lost everybody. Why didn't the world just come to an end? Why did the sum rise? Why did everything look so normal?

My father didn't wait for me, he was taken from Auschwitz to one of the deadliest working camps, Ebensee, where he worked in stone quarries. He died of overwork and starvation four to six weeks before liberation, a few weeks before his 49th birthday.

As for the rest of our extended family: uncle, Mishi, my father's younger brother and my cousins, Anne, Eva and Ditha, survived. My cousin, Les, came home from labor camp to be accidentally shot by a drunken Russian officer, he was paralyzed and survived a couple of years. Nobody from my mother's side survived.

My Uncle Bela was beaten to death by the Hungarian police, his wife and son, Steve, were killed in the gas chambers. George made it back from one of the harshest labor camps, found out that his family is gone, joined a group of Check partisans, was captured and executed by Hungarian military court.

My only girlfriend who came back with her mother was Eva, so I stayed with them for a couple of weeks and than I went to Cluj (Kolozsvar) where I stayed with Anne, her husband and Eva and attended the faculty of chemistry of the Hungarian University. To continue this account past the year 1945 would be like talking about a totally different, a brand new life.

I read quite a few books written by survivors of the Holocaust of by children of survivors and often I wondered how sane I am. However, I have one thing in common with all of them: my life has two separate parts that have absolutely no connection with each other: my life before Auschwitz and my life after.

Physical suffering, unless it leaves you with permanent marks is easily forgotten, but how can you forget the other kind? even if I had any illusions about the pain fading away in all these years, the tears that I shad writing these pages, over 46 years later, taught me otherwise.

There is so much more that I would like to write about but it would either touch my new life or it would involve other people's memories.

When I was about 12 years old, we all had fancy, so called "Memory Books". Our friends, teachers and even our parents had the privilege to fill a page with their thoughts and wishes. I want to end my story with trying to translate what my father wrote:

> "When you advance, think of where you started from, since everything is a circle with no end. When they cut you off or try to stop you, defend yourself with your head. The heart is for us! And learn, learn, because everybody but especially your father will love you very much."

Note:
<u>Original Hungarian:</u>

> "Ha elorehaladsz, gondolj a kiindulasra
> Mert minden csak egy kor, melynek vege se hossza.
> Ha eledbe vagnak, eltorlaszolnak, fejeddel vedekezz
> A sziv az nekunk kell
> Es tanulj, tanulj, mert akkor mindenki,
> De foleg Apad fog nagyon szeretni."

PART II

After my weekly talk about my Holocaust experiences at the Museum of Tolerance, people often ask me if I wrote a book, an autobiography. My answer usually is: "Everybody else did, I don't think I will".

I wrote the first half about my life through liberation mostly for my grandchildren and now I will start to tell about my life after, a new one that has absolutely no connection to the previous one.

On September 7, 1946 I got married to a childhood friend, Andrew Kun. I was 20. Under normal circumstances I would have finished school first, but all of us survivors married soon after the war regardless of age. In January of 1946, while I was still attending the university, two of my hometown friends took me to a communist Party meeting and I joined. I make no excuses or apologies for what turned out to be a mistake. I was 19, idealistic, a true believer in equality and in liberating the oppressed masses from under "capitalistic exploitation". (Little did I know as to how quickly the same "oppressed masses" will become the "oppressors".) Most minority students (Hungarians and Jews) were Party members and we actively participated in the last multiparty elections that took place in the fall of 1946. I remember several nights replacing the right wing posters placed by the Romanian students with our communist ones.

Since I had my first daughter, Annie, eleven months after we got married, I wasn't too active the first 1-1/2 years. When Annie was about 9 months old, somebody got me to join the Jewish Democratic Committee. We had a seminar on the History of the communist Party and, of course, Marxism-Leninism. During one of the sessions, a leading member of the local (regional) Party was present and I don't remember what I said that impressed him to the extent that he invited me to teach Party history to the staff members of the regional Party headquarters. The work was "volunteer" and refusing, of course, was out of the question. After a few weeks, they gave me a paycheck, without ever asking me if I want to commit to full-time work. So I was hooked for about three months, at which time the woman who was with us from before Annie was born, quit. I could not find replacement, so I stopped working.

I do have to point out that in these early years, except for the old time communists who were all in high positions, they did not have any educated or even literate people with real working class or poor peasant backgrounds.

Those of us with middle class backgrounds, too young to have been exploiters or fascists (the later was more tolerated) were used but not entirely trusted.

My next job in the fall of 1948 was with one of the state-owned companies, as the assistant to the Personnel Director, who was a totally illiterate Romanian peasant.

In early 1949, it was decided that all Party members will be checked out for their backgrounds. A committee was sent to each regional headquarter and, of course, they needed people who could read and write. I was drafted again.

I worked very hard, very long hours. I typed for hours. I was always a lousy typist, never learned how to sit at a typewriter without my back killing me, but I was the best they had, and I thought I worked to make this world a better place...

Towards the end of 1949, the "verification" was all but done. A committee came from Bucharest to individually talk to all of us who were involved in the process and decide about our future. I heard rumors that they had plans to send me to some special school to train me for the Foreign Office, because of my knowledge of languages (English, German, French and Romanian, plus my native Hungarian.)

I was 6 months pregnant with our second daughter, Marianne, so I knew all plans will be postponed for a while.

Just before my turn came to meet this committee, we got special orders to "reverify" all those who were liberated by a Western Power.

Anyway, when they asked me were I learned English, I told them I had private lessons and I immediately blurted out that I worked as an interpreter for the American and the British armies after liberation. Well, I thought that was the biggest mistake of my life, but it turned out it was the best thing I ever did.

I got a job as the secretary of an other illiterate company president. I had Marianne on March 11, 1950, and shortly after that I was summoned to the Party headquarters, where I was told that because of my bourgeois origins and because they can not verify my activities abroad (my "voluntary" participation in the Holocaust??!!), the suspension of my membership has been decided.

I am not going to deny it that my whole world fell apart. I knew that fascists were forgiven because of their youth, but I was condemned because I interpreted in a Displaced Persons camp mess-hall.

I wrote them an angry letter and that was it.

My husband was disappointed with the system way before all this happened, so in May of 1950 we requested a visa to immigrate to Israel, this being the only possibility at that time.

For the next ten years we were refused many times; we re-applied and were refused again and again. Meanwhile, I got and lost several jobs, whenever somebody decided that "being an enemy" I cannot be trusted. But we had many friends, so I always ended up with a new job.

I have to relate a small incident that now seems to be funny, but it was not at that time. In the fall of 1947, right after Annie was born, a former schoolmate from the university came to our town (only 20 kilometers from the Hungarian border) and stopped by at our house to say "Hello". A few days later, on a rainy day, he reappeared with a Romanian soldier. He tried to cross the border, was caught and managed to convince his guard to stop by on his way to jail. He went to the bathroom and when he came out, he whispered in my ears that he hid a wet $10.00 bill behind the tank, we should take it out and dry it (owning foreign currency was a severe crime!.) We dried the bill, but they probably beat the truth out of him at state security, so my husband was called-in a few days later. If the chief had not been a Jew, who was more intent on catching fascists than Jews (he did plenty of the later too), my husband could have easily gone to jail for a couple of years for this terrible crime. (My friend was eventually released, we did not keep in touch.)

When people ask me if communism was as bad as fascism, my answer is a very definite NO. Fear of being deprived of your freedom is definitely not as bad as fear of losing your life.

Somewhere in the mid fifties, this older communist woman liked me so much (a motherly figure!) that she used all her connections to have me reinstated in the Party (I wouldn't dare dissuade her!). The result was that some big shot came from Bucharest and in a full membership meeting changed my previous "suspension" to a full and "final" exclusion. (You could not quit the communist Party, only they could terminate your membership). I will be always thankful to them for kicking me out while I was still young and could start a new life. Eventually, even those who fought for communism all their lives got disappointed, but it could have taken me a few more years.

In 1960, a new law appeared. While previously you could only apply to immigrate to Israel, and only if you were a Jew, now you could apply for a Western European country, provided you got an entry visa.

One of my father's partners, an American citizen, lived in Belgium at that time. He sent us an entry visa, and a year later we received our passports. Of course, they made you pay exorbitant

prices for your passports, for renouncing your Romanian citizenship and for everything else they could dream up. If you were 14, you were considered an adult and all the "fees" applied. Annie was going to turn 14 on August 5, so they did not release our passports until we fully paid all her fees too. All the formalities, including the customs inspection at our departure, amounted to a major nightmare; we were considered criminals; I don't think anybody treated me that way since Auschwitz. For instance, they decided that we have to put every piece of luggage in a canvas bag. The seamstress at the hotel sewed the bags for us, so we were prepared. At the station, I bought the allowed amount of cigarettes (we used them in Vienna to trade for food) and put them in a canvas bag. The jerk started screaming at me that I want to take the country's valuable assets with me. Even my communist trained brain did not understand what he was talking about, until he pointed to the extra canvas bag.

Our journey on the overcrowded train was almost uneventful. In Budapest Andy's aunt and a couple of uncles came to see us in the train, with wonderful, much appreciated hot coffee and presents for the girls and myself.

At the Austrian border they took our passports away and when the officer returned with the passports of the non-Jews in our compartment, he told me that the Sohnut, the Israel Agency, retained ours. I showed him our tickets to Antwerp and he promptly returned our passports. I suppose because of our Hungarian last name, they were not really sure if we are Jewish. We had nothing against going to Israel, but we did not appreciate being forced to do so.

We arrived to Vienna penniless, since taking currency out from Romania was considered a crime. At the station a stranger, also a recent arrival, gave us a few shillings, enough for a phone call and a cab. We stayed a few days, courtesy of the American Joint and the proceeds from the sale of our cigarettes, schnapps and salami.

On a Sunday, the eve of Rosh Hashana 1961, we boarded the train for Antwerp.

We had some money left, that we spent on a meal at the railway station when we arrived. We left the girls and our luggage at the station and proceeded to find our sponsor after we found out that they lived very close by. There was nobody home and there we were in a strange big city, penniless and knowing nobody. We saw religious Jews walking on the street ready for the High Holidays; I stopped one, asked in German if he by any chance knows Mr. Rosenberg. He answered in perfect Hungarian, and directed us to this man's house whose brother-in-law worked for Mr. Rosenberg.

Well, I went in (Andy waited outside) and the first mistake I made was extending my hand for a handshake; well, he did not shake hands with women (super orthodox!). He started to question me about people in my home town that he knew. Of course, I did not know any of them. We came from the same town and from two different worlds. After my hatless husband appeared, there was serious doubt about our Jewishness. But then we hit the jackpot: one of the people he mentioned living in Antwerp used to work in my father's office. I talked to him on the phone, somebody picked us up, we picked up our abandoned children at the station, meals were arranged, hotel rooms were booked, our ordeal was over.

I have to say something about our first hotel. It was small, very clean, in the middle of the city. We had two rooms and I remember our room having this big sunken bathtub. The hotel was owned and run by a very nice couple.

We sent the girls to school the first week after our arrival, and we went apartment hunting. While we were out, my husband got very nervous and insisted that we get back to the hotel before the kids get back from school. Well, I did not understand what all the fuss was about, until he finally told me that he had good reason to believe that this was in fact a "rendez-vous hotel", where they rented rooms by the hour. He was right, but it was very nice compared to our next one which was a miserable dump, but we got an apartment shortly thereafter.

We had a good visa, we could have stayed in Belgium for good and we intended to. I worked at the beginning for Rosenberg sorting diamonds, but after Andy got established in a semi-legit practice of dentistry, I stopped working. For my father's partner I was still my father's little girl who should not ruin her eyes sorting diamonds.

My father's other partner, Mr. Rappaport, came from New York to Antwerp, and he talked us into applying for an American visa. We did so, just to please him.

I never wanted to come to America. I grew up reading Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreyser, John Steinbeck and Howard Fast. I thought of the United States as a country where people work on assembly lines and old folks lose their homes to greedy bankers because they are not able to pay their last mortgage installment.

We received our visa surprisingly in two and a half months, and we arrived to Detroit (that is where the HIAS sent us) on October 2, 1962.

Andy's two uncles (one with his wife) came to see us from Los Angeles, and when they saw that we work and make ends meet, they suggested we move to Los Angeles. They were nice people, helped us a little but since they were not rich, they wanted to make sure we

can support our own family.

We arrived to Los Angeles after a long driving trip in July, 1963. We started out with towing my little 1960 Ford Falcon with our other car. Somewhere in Nebraska, we had a minor accident and our tow-bar broke. So, as a fairly inexperienced driver, who never drove on freeways, I had to drive the next 1000+ miles. To be safe, I had the girls travel with Andy, and I drove alone.

Except for being rained out one night on a campground, our trip was fairly uneventful. We lost each other only ones, but we got back together before nightfall.

1963 to present 1998 would take another book, so just a few highlights:

We worked hard, we were successful, our daughters married right after college their high school sweethearts. We approved of both their choices. Everything went very well, the girls and their husbands all went to graduate school. Marianne had Laura in 1978 and Jamie in 1981.

The Gods must have gotten jealous; tragedy hit us suddenly and very hard. On April 30, 1987, Marianne's husband, Marc, a brilliant astronomer and all around great human being, was killed in a freak accident. Of the hundreds of letters that Marianne received, I remember one very well. It was written by a son of Holocaust survivors and it said: survivors are more devastated by losing a loved one because they have no experience in mourning, since they lost all their families at the same time. Under normal circumstances, you lose grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, etc., it hurts but you get some practice.

It is 1998. I am 72 and my husband is 75. Our families are doing all right. Our first born, Annie (a hardworking lawyer) finally gave us a wonderful grandchild, Nathalie, after twenty years of marriage, in 1989. Marianne's daughters are almost grown up: Laura 20, and Jamie will be 17 in October this year. They are both the best.

In 1995, on a sleepless night, I wrote this poem about my parents. as I get older, I know how young they were! I know now that they were robbed of forty years of life; they never had a chance to see their only child grow up and of course they never saw their grandchildren.

This poem could have been written by any survivor my age.

I Didn't Mourn

How she loved life
And loved to laugh
At 45 she sent to the Left
She was Beautiful!
I didn't know that Left meant Death
I didn't mourn

Weeks later when all hope died
I was busy to survive
The hurst was there
But hunger was the ruling force
I didn't mourn

He loved music and loved the arts
He was generous and very bright
At 48 he starved and died
When I found out the pain was sharp
But I had to start a brand new life
I didn't mourn

More than 50 years passed since
There is no acceptance
There is no peace
The pain is deeper every day
I'll always mourn

Agnes Kun
July 1995.